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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

REVIEWED BY *W. Caldwell*

DATE *Oct. 28 '81*

PORTIONS DENIED/AS INDICATED

April 27, 1978

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Reviewed by: *W. Caldwell*

Date: *9 May 1981*

TO : The Secretary

FROM : INR - William G. Bowdler *WGB*
NEA - Harold H. Saunders *HS*

SUBJECT: The Coup in Afghanistan

Current Situation

Information about the coup underway in Afghanistan is sketchy:

--Rebel forces appeared to be in control of Kabul as of 11 p.m. local time (1 p.m. EST). Our Embassy has reported that fighting is continuing. A jet aircraft fired rockets toward the Embassy, and increased military activity is expected when daylight returns. The rebels have captured Radio Kabul, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Post Office, and besieged the Presidential Palace (see map). The Air Force unit in Kabul is under rebel control, judging from its attacks on the Palace.

--It remains unclear who is leading the coup. Col. Abdul Qader, whom the Embassy identified as Chief of Staff of the Air Force, claimed on Radio Kabul to be speaking on behalf of Colonel Aslam Watanjar, as yet unidentified.

--Daoud's situation is unknown. The rebels claimed that he "is gone completely and forever," but there are reports that he is still alive, perhaps inside the French Embassy compound (which is next to the Palace and which suffered a tank attack that destroyed the consular building).

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Background

The coup seems to have been triggered by the arrest last night of leading members of the Khalq ("masses") Party. This pro-Soviet, Communist party brought out some 15,000 persons (five times its known membership) during the funeral on April 19 of its assassinated chief ideologue. The government claimed that it tolerated the demonstration to flush out and arrest Khalq leaders.

Military action, apparently led by army sympathizers with tanks, followed at noon, local time. While there is no hard evidence as yet that the rebels have links to the Khalq or to the Soviet Union, bits and pieces of information--such as Qader's remark that power was passed to "the masses" and clenched fist salutes by soldiers--indicate that they may.

Rebel Policies

The attitudes and policies the rebels will adopt if they can form a new government are unclear. In a Kabul Radio statement, they announced a foreign policy of respect for Islam, "democratic independence," "progressive" development, "positive" non-alignment, friendly relations with all countries, and respect for the UN. If the Khalq Party plays a major role, the new government would probably be more friendly to the USSR than Daoud has been and less friendly toward the US.

Reactions of Neighbors

Thus far there have been no public comments from any of Afghanistan's neighbors. The role of the Soviets in the coup and their attitude toward it are not clear. We have no evidence of Soviet involvement, however.

Iran will view the situation with considerable alarm. The Shah has long been concerned about Afghanistan's Soviet connection and the possibility that it would veer sharply to the left if Daoud were overthrown. Despite this concern, it is doubtful that Tehran will undertake military moves at this point.

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